

Library Standards

This Trustee Essential covers:

- *How your library might benefit from use of library standards*
- *Different ways to use library standards*
- *How standards relate to library planning*

The development of the publication *Wisconsin Public Library Standards* (available at <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/standard.html>) was guided by the belief that Wisconsin's public libraries play a critical role in providing free access to knowledge, information, and diversity of ideas to all residents of the state. All Wisconsin residents need and deserve at least a basic level of library service. The standards provide a way to measure a basic level of quality for public library service and also provide a pathway to excellence in library service.

Thanks to tremendous advances in information technology and to the cooperation of all types of libraries in Wisconsin, even the smallest library can offer access to an almost unimaginable quantity of both electronic and traditional information resources. But while this new environment presents great opportunities, it also presents great challenges. Today's library staff must master not only the skills and knowledge necessary to provide traditional library services, but also the new and constantly changing skills and knowledge required to utilize the latest in information technologies. Challenges also face the trustees and other government officials responsible for securing the funding and other resources necessary to provide library service that meets current needs and expectations.

Wisconsin Public Library Standards attempts to cover the services, resources, and other requirements for basic library service that should be available to *all* residents of the state, including those who face physical or other barriers to their use of public libraries. Wisconsin's public library standards are entirely voluntary, but every library in Wisconsin is encouraged to meet the standards covered by the checklists in the *Standards* publication. Counties can establish minimum operating standards for libraries within the county under Wisconsin Statutes Section 43.11(3)(d). Libraries that fail to meet county standards may be denied exemption from the county library tax. For more information on county library standards, see <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/coplan.html>.

How to use the *Standards*

The simplest way to use the *Standards* is to provide a photocopy of the checklists in the *Standards* document to each library board member and review those checklists at your board meetings. If one chapter is covered per board meeting, it will take five meetings to review the *Standards* checklists completely. If your library does not meet certain standards, you can work with your library director to develop a plan to work toward achieving those standards in the future.

Libraries that already meet the minimums represented by the standards can develop service goals based on local needs.

Quantitative standards are provided for a number of library service parameters, such as hours open, staffing levels, collection size, and collection expenditures. Quantitative standards are established at four levels of effort: basic, moderate, enhanced, and excellent. Your library can establish service targets by selecting the appropriate level of effort to apply to each standard or can use the levels to plan for progressive improvements over a period of time.

A handy tool developed by Rick Krumwiede, Director of the Outagamie Waupaca Library System, automatically calculates service targets for your library. All you need to input is your library name, municipal population, and library service population. You can download this tool from <http://www.owlsweb.info/l4l/quanstd05.xls>.

Library planning and the *Standards*

It is most effective to use the *Standards* as a tool to assist with a locally developed planning process. In the context of a local planning process, your planning committee can use the checklists to gather information about the library and the community during the information-gathering phase of the planning process. The *Standards* can also help the planning committee establish objectives for the plan. Chapter 2 of the *Standards* discusses in more detail how to use the *Standards* as part of a planning process. See also *Trustee Essential #11: Planning for the Library's Future* for more information about the planning process.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why should our library be concerned about state standards when those standards are voluntary?
2. Do new technologies reduce the need for your library to provide traditional library services? Why or why not?

Additional Sources of Information:

Your library system staff (see *Trustee Tool B: Library System Map and Contact Information*)

Wisconsin Public Library Standards (available at <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/standard.html>)

Outagamie Waupaca Library System (OWLS) Public Library Standards Web Page at <http://www.owlsweb.info/L4L/wistds.asp>

Wisconsin public library statistics (at <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/dm-lib-stat.html>)

Federal-State Cooperative System data (at <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/libraries/public.html>)

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